

Bad flu season getting worse in U.S.

Health officials say cases on the rise in 47 states

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USA TODAY

Flu is surging across the United States amid a busy holiday travel time. The state of New York is among those most heavily hit. For the week that ended Dec. 20, the state of New York reported its highest number of positive flu cases (71,123) ever recorded in a single week, according to the New York State Department of Health. That represented an increase of 38% over the previous week, the department said.

New York is one of 14 states that have reported high or very high activity of outpatient visits to health care providers for influenza-like illnesses, for the week ending Dec. 13, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The District of Columbia, New York City and Puerto Rico have also registered high or very high flu-like cases, the agency says.

As of Dec. 16, flu infections were on the rise, or likely growing, in 47 states, with cases declining only in Hawaii, the CDC projected.

The increase in seasonal flu activity across the United States is similar to several past seasons, the CDC says. But it comes along with a new flu strain – subclade K, a variation of the influenza A(H3N2) virus – responsible for flu outbreaks in Japan, the United Kingdom and Canada.

Health officials have been concerned the current flu vaccine may be a mismatch for the new variant but have expressed confidence it has protection against serious illness.

Health officials aren't yet sure if the new flu strain is leading to more infections or more severe cases, "but what is clear is that cases are increasing, and we're seeing a lot of influenza cases increasing across the country, and that's a trend that we're sure will continue into the new year," Andrew Pekosz, co-director of the Johns Hopkins Center of Excellence in Influenza Research and Response, said in a Dec. 16 video health briefing.

Fewer Americans getting flu shots

Also potentially contributing to an increase in cases is a decline in Americans getting flu shots. While more than 47.6 million flu vaccinations have been given at retail pharmacies and physicians' offices so far in the 2025-2026 season, that's down about 3 million from last year, according to the CDC.

The government shutdown, which ran from Oct. 1 to Nov. 12, also likely meant a decrease in flu activity data, which could have affected vaccination rates, Jennifer Nuzzo, professor of epidemiology and director of the Pandemic Center at Brown University School of Public Health, said in a flu report published Dec. 19 by the Journal of the American Medical Association.

"We're potentially heading into a flu season that could be quite a doozy, and we know we're starting it with fewer data and, more crucially, fewer vaccinations," she said.

Flu has led to 1,900 deaths

The CDC estimates that there have been at least 4.6 million illnesses, 49,000 hospitalizations, and 1,900 deaths from flu so far this season. Dur-



A recent decline in Americans getting flu shots could be contributing to an increase in influenza cases.
MARK ZALESKI/THE TENNESSEAN FILE



Health officials have been concerned the current flu vaccine may be a mismatch for the new variant but have expressed confidence it has protection against serious illness. GREG WOHLFORD/ERIE TIMES-NEWS FILE

ing the week that ended Dec. 13, there were two pediatric deaths reported to the CDC, bringing flu-related pediatric deaths so far this season to three, the agency said.

In Colorado, where the CDC said flu-like activity was "very high," emergency department visits with a flu diagnosis increased 7% for the week ending Dec. 20, according to the state's Department of Public Health and Environment.

Influenza accounted for 7% of emergency department visits in Louisiana, up from about 6% the previous week, according to the Louisiana Department of Health. All respiratory illnesses including flu, COVID-19 and RSV made up nearly 9% of emergency visits, the department said.

In New York City, visits to emergency rooms with a flu diagnosis increased to

8.75% for the week ending Dec. 20, up from 6.76% the previous week, according to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

States with high flu activity

The CDC's FluView Interactive Map is based on outpatient visits to health care providers for influenza-like illness within a state or territory. These states, territories and cities had high or very high levels:

- Colorado (very high)
- Connecticut (high)
- District of Columbia (high)
- Idaho (high)
- Massachusetts (high)
- New Hampshire (high)
- New Jersey (high)
- New Mexico (high)

- New York (very high)
- New York City (very high)
- Puerto Rico (high)
- Louisiana (very high)
- Georgia (high)
- Maryland (high)
- Michigan (high)
- North Carolina (high)
- South Carolina (high)

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms associated with H3N2 are similar to those of other influenza viruses and include fever, cough, runny nose, fatigue, muscle aches and chills.

How to protect yourself

It's not too late to get a flu vaccination. The CDC, World Health Organization and other leading medical institutions consider it the most effective way to prevent serious illness from the flu. Everyone 6 months and older is eligible for the flu vaccine unless they have a specified medical condition, such as an allergy to its ingredients or a previous severe reaction to the shot.

To help stop the spread of flu, wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, notes the New York state health department. Other ways to prevent the spread include:

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

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NOTICE OF CANCELLATION OF CERTIFICATION HEARING ON PROPOSED ELECTRICAL TRANSMISSION LINE CORRIDOR

The certification hearing, Application No. TA25-20 (OGC No. 25-1510), Division of Administrative Hearings No. 25-004655TL, originally scheduled to begin January 12, 2026, has been cancelled. In accordance with the Florida Electrical Transmission Line Siting Act, Section 403.527(6), F.S., on December 16, 2025, all parties to this proceeding stipulated that there are no disputed issues of material fact or law in this matter. Accordingly, on December 16, 2025, the administrative law judge issued an order granting a request to cancel the hearing and relinquish jurisdiction to the Department of Environmental Protection.

Pursuant to Section 403.529(1)(a), F.S., the Department of Environmental Protection will issue a final order within 40 days of the Administrative Law Judge's order.